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SUBJECT: HELMAND: GARMSIR SHURA SUPPORTS ISAF FORCES

REF: Kabul 1737, Kabul 1677

11. (SBU) Summary: On July 13, Governor Mangal visited Garmsir district for the first time since the Marine Expeditionary Brigade's (MEB) arrival on July 2, opening a major USAID project and holding a well-attended shura with local elders. Atmospherics were very positive. Approximately 350-400 elders attended the shura, and several of them spoke to the crowd encouraging reconciliation and urging the people to resist the Taliban and help identify Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). National Directorate of Security (NDS) Chief General Naim drew on parallels from the life of Prophet Muhammad to illustrate the acceptability of working with non-Muslims toward common goals, and highlighted the sacrifices of ISAF forces fighting on behalf of Afghan civilians. Governor Mangal gave well-received remarks noting reconstruction achievements and the contributions of ISAF forces to Garmsir's security. Mangal traveled with several local media who filmed and recorded each segment of the trip. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On July 13, Governor Mangal flew to Garmsir district center accompanied by NDS Chief General Naim, State and USAID PRT officers, and local media. The trip began with Mangal touching down at FOB Delhi for a brief from the Marines and from local ANP and ANA chiefs. The briefing included maps of areas under MEB control and of insurgent contact. The group then mounted MRAPs and drove to the site of USAID's "Drop 8" sluice gate rebuild project. Mangal, accompanied by local notables and press, cut the ceremonial ribbon and announced the completion of the project. While at the Drop 8 site, piles of wheat chaff could be seen dotting the surrounding fields, indicating that these fields did not grow poppy last season.

13. (SBU) From FOB Delhi the group moved to the District Center building for the shura. Around 350-400 elders were already in place seated in the inner courtyard when Mangal arrived. Helmand NDS Chief General Naim gave the first set of remarks and spoke at length about reconciliation and other topics. He drew on numerous parallels from the life of the prophet Muhammad to illustrate that, just as Muhammad had worked closely with non-believers, it is likewise good to embrace non-believers (ISAF, in this case) who are friendly and work with them towards common goals. He emphasized that the Taliban practice of destroying clinics and bridges does not demonstrate Islam or jihad, and encouraged the elders to report IED locations to the NDS, noting that it is mainly Afghans who are killed by them. He stressed that all ISAF operations in Helmand are approved by Governor Mangal. Naim seemed to strike a chord with the audience when he said, "Foreigners are not like Afghans; while we have ten sons they only have one, but they will send their only sons to Afghanistan to fight the Taliban for your security." His remarks appeared well-received as numerous elders sitting close to the podium (and thus more important) nodded at as he emphasized his

points.

¶4. (SBU) An elderly local mullah, so frail he had to cling to the podium to remain upright, told Mangal that the people of Garmsir are happy with the security brought by the Marines and asked the governor to keep responding to security issues, such as the unsafe road north to Nawa and Lashkar Gah. Three Garmsir tribal elders then spoke in sequence. Haji Abdul Samad Khan urged people to use the shura as an opportunity to share their views with the governor about security and development. Haji Adam Khan argued that reconciliation with Taliban commanders is the way to solve the conflict, and said GIROA must deliver with security and development.

Haji Adam Khan concluded his speech by saying "don't tell me about tribe or language, tell me about honesty and truth." A third elder gave a lengthy address urging people to shun foreign fighters and be willing to help the government implement security by not sheltering Taliban fighters.

¶5. (SBU) Mawlawi Meherdi, a Lashkar Gah-based mullah closely allied with Mangal, told the assembled elders that the government would provide for them but that they must not help the Taliban. He said IEDs are illegal and against Islam. He asked rhetorically how the Taliban can continue to tax people if only the elected government has that right because it provides services in return. Mawlawi concluded with a forceful statement condemning suicide bombings as haram (forbidden in Islam).

¶6. (SBU) Governor Mangal then took to the podium and was roundly applauded. Mangal praised the elders' attendance and offered his condolences for members of their families lost to mines and IEDs in Garmsir. He then gave an overview of the operations in Babaji (British Area of Operations), Basharan, Nawa, Garmsir, and Khanashin

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districts, noting the very low civilian casualty numbers and light damage to compounds. Mangal said rebuilding schools, clinics and roads are the key goals once security is sufficiently established in Garmsir, and insisted the Marines would stay for the long term. He noted the completion of Drop 8, as well as other improvements over the last year to the district center and local roads. Mangal told the crowd he would send 100 tons of wheat to Garmsir (Note: the PRT is working with Mangal's office and the MEB on the logistics for this), and thanked the PRT (State Department in particular) for providing the prayer rugs he distributed to local mosques ahead of the shura. Mangal described his signature "Food Zone" project to discourage poppy production by providing wheat seed that was successful last year, and stated that he will extend the project to include 4,220 families in Garmsir for 2009.

¶7. (SBU) Mangal spoke briefly about the upcoming election, encouraging the elders and mullahs to send their families and those in their villages to vote for their choice for president. He asked that they vote for a good, honest candidate who would be best for Afghanistan's future.

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